Blitz Phoenix

Chapter 15: Open Doors

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http://www.blitzphoenix.com/

THERE IT IS, TERRY!
THAT'S THE HQ! IT'S WHERE WE BASE MOST OF OUR OPERATIONS, AS YOU MIGHT HAVE GUESSED!
WE'LL GET ALL YOUR PAPERWORK SORTED OUT HERE BEFORE WE SHOW YOU WHERE YOU'LL BE STAYING.
IS... THAT YOUR LAB?
OH, WE HAVE A LAB THERE! DO YOU WANT TO SEE IT?
NO.
IT'S NOT A PROBLEM! I'M SURE THE STAFF WOULD LOVE TO MEET YOU!
THEY HAVEN'T HAD A LOT OF CHANCES TO SEE REAL FUNCTIONAL CIRCUITS! LET ALONE A HUMAN ONE!

YOU DON'T MAKE CIRCUITS HERE?
WE'RE TRYING TO! NOT *HUMAN* CIRCUITS, BUT RIGHT NOW ALL WE'RE ABLE TO MANAGE IS SOME REVERSE ENGINEERING.
TRUTH IS, WE CAN'T MAKE MUCH PROGRESS, WITH THAT BITCH STICKING HER NOSE INTO EVERYTHING--
OH SHIT, SHE'S YOUR MOTHER, ISN'T SHE?
UH, WELL... I DON'T EXACTLY *LIKE* HER.
WELL, GOOD. WE'RE ON THE SAME PAGE, THEN.

Scritch Scritch
... AND THAT'S THE LAST OF THE PAPERWORK! YOU'RE NOW OFFICIALLY UNDER MY EMPLOYMENT.
WHAT'S WRONG? NO ONE'S GOING TO CARE YOU'RE A HIGH SCHOOL DROP OUT, KID.
YOU'LL BE MAKING MORE MONEY HERE THAN YOU WOULD WITH SOME COLLEGE DEGREE, ANYWAY.
... SO YOU NEED ME TO TELL YOU ABOUT AMANDA NOW, RIGHT?
WHY RUSH? WE CAN TAKE CARE OF THAT TOMORROW!
YOU'VE BEEN SHAKING EVER SINCE WE GOT TO THE AIRPORT! I'D RATHER GIVE YOU TIME TO GET YOUR NERVES TOGETHER BEFORE WE TALK!

FIRST, HERE.
A CREDIT CARD! THAT'S MINE, BUT YOU CAN BORROW IT FOR A BIT!
SINCE YOU'RE ONLY SEVENTEEN I'M SURE YOU DON'T HAVE A WHOLE LOT OF CASH ON YOU, SO YOU'LL NEED SOME BEFORE YOUR FIRST PAYCHECK GOES THROUGH.
FOR WHAT?
YOU KNOW, LUNCH OR WHATEVER.
WHAT EXACTLY ARE YOU HIRING ME FOR?
DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT PART JUST YET. YOU WON'T BE READY FOR IT FOR A WHILE, ANYWAY.

NEXT, HERE'S YOUR KEYCARD SO YOU CAN GET BACK IN THE BUILDING, AND THE KEY TO YOUR NEW PLACE!
W-WHEN DID YOU TAKE A PICTURE OF ME?
OH, WE JUST GRABBED A SHOT OFF THE SECURITY CAMERAS WHEN YOU CAME IN!
IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT, WE CAN RETAKE IT LATER. I JUST DIDN'T WANT TO WASTE YOUR TIME TODAY.
THAT SHOULD BE ENOUGH FOR NOW! SAMUEL HERE WILL TAKE YOU TO NEW HOME!
I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND, BUT WE TOOK THE LIBERTY OF FINDING YOU AN APARTMENT.

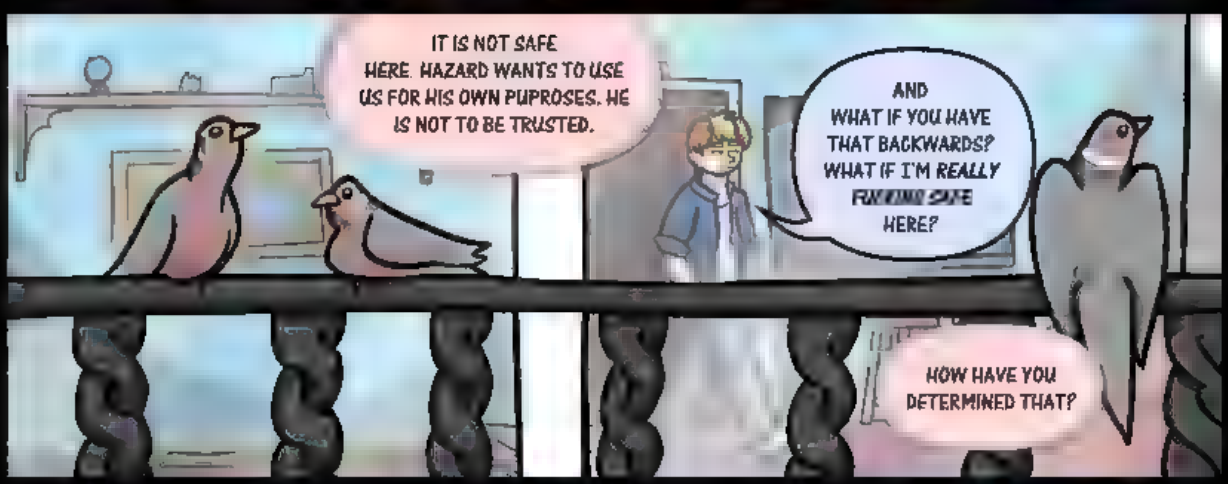
AN... APARTMENT?
YEAH! THE GUY WHO OWNS IT IS A FRIEND OF MINE AND HE OWES ME SOME FAVORS, SO I GOT YOU A NICE ONE. GREAT GUY.
YOU MEAN, I'M NOT STAYING HERE?
HM? HERE?
YOU'RE LETTING ME LEAVE THE BUILDING?
WHY WOULD YOU STAY HERE? THIS IS MY COMPANY HEADQUARTERS, NOT SOME SORT OF SHELTER.
ALRIGHT SAM, DAYLIGHT'S BURNING! GET HIM ON HIS WAY!
YES, SIR.

THIS IS YOUR NEW HOME. IF YOU'RE HUNGRY, THERE ARE SEVERAL RESTAURANTS AND DELIS WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE.
YOUR FIRST PAYCHECK WILL BE THIS FRIDAY. YOU'LL BE EXPECTED TO PAY YOUR OWN RENT, AS WELL AS BUY YOUR OWN CLOTHES AND GROCERIES.
YOUR DRESSERS ARE PRE-STOCKED WITH A COMPANY UNIFORM YOU WILL BE EXPECTED TO WEAR DURING WORK HOURS.
I'LL BE BY AT SEVEN FORTY-FIVE TOMORROW MORNING TO ESCORT YOU BACK FOR YOUR FIRST FULL DAY, SO MAKE SURE YOU'RE READY BEFORE THEN.

:CREEAK:
WAIT! WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
HOME.
YOU'RE NOT STAYING HERE?
WHY WOULD I?
YOU'RE JUST LEAVING ME HERE? BY MYSELF?
THIS IS YOUR APARTMENT NOW. YOU LIVE HERE.
THE CITY OFFERS A LOT TO DO IF YOU'RE BORED.
B-BUT WHAT IF I JUST... LEFT? AND YOU NEVER SAW ME AGAIN?
THAT WOULD NOT BE WISE.
HAVE A NICE EVENING, TERRY.
:CR-CLACK:

I HAVE...
...MY OWN APARTMENT?
TAKEO, WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING?!
CHECKING FOR SURVEILLANCE DEVICES.
THERE ARE SEVEN CAMERAS HIDDEN IN THIS HOUSING UNIT.
CAMERAS?
AND TWO AUDIO-RECORDING DEVICES. I HAVE DISABLED THEM.
... OH. I DIDN'T EVEN THINK ABOUT THAT.
THANKS, I GUESS.
NOW THAT WE ARE ALONE, WE HAVE ITEMS WE NEED TO DISCUSS.

YEAH, NO. I DON'T WANT TO TALK TO YOU RIGHT NOW.
OR EVER.
"EVER" IS IMPRACTICAL. WE NEED TO COME TO A DECISION-
WE DON'T NEED TO DECIDE ANYTHING.
WE MUST TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY ALONE TO FLEE.
NO.


IT IS NOT SAFE HERE. HAZARD WANTS TO USE US FOR HIS OWN PUPROSES. HE IS NOT TO BE TRUSTED.
AND WHAT IF YOU HAVE THAT BACKWARDS? WHAT IF I'M REALLY FUCKING SAFE HERE?
HOW HAVE YOU DETERMINED THAT?

IF HAZARD'S LOOKING FOR AMANDA, AND SHE'S AVOIDING HAZARD, THEN SHE ISN'T ABOUT TO JUST WALTZ OVER AND KIDNAP ME AGAIN, RIGHT?
AND WHAT GOOD WOULD IT DO FOR ME TO LEAVE? SO AMANDA AND HAZARD WILL BE LOOKING FOR ME? FUCK THAT.
AND IF HE'S BEING HONEST AND REALLY ISN'T GOING TO EXPERIMENT ON ME, THEN...

MAYBE THIS IS JUST THE BEST PLACE FOR ME. MAYBE I'M JUST TOO DANGEROUS TO LIVE A NORMAL LIFE ANYMORE.
I'M NOT MEANT TO HAVE A NORMAL LIFE WITH NORMAL FRIENDS AND NORMAL PROBLEMS. NOT THAT I GOT TO KEEP ANY OF MY FRIENDS FOR ALL THAT LONG, ANYWAY... SINCE DAD ALWAYS MADE US MOVE.
I DON'T KNOW WHY I THOUGHT I COULD KEEP THEM THIS TIME.

YOU ARE FAR TOO TRUSTING OF HAZARD'S INTENTIONS
SAYS WHO? [redacted]?!
SHE'S THE ONE YOU GOT YOUR OPINION FROM, RIGHT?!
WHY WOULD I CARE IF SHE THINKS HAZARD'S BAD?! HAZARD SOUNDS EXACTLY LIKE WHO I SHOULD BE STICKING AROUND WITH!
THERE IS MORE TO THEIR RIVALRY THAN YOU UNDERSTAND--
YOU SAID YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT HAZARD, SO HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT?! ARE YOU LYING TO ME?!
I HAVE NEVER LIED TO YOU.
OH. NEVER?!
"HEY, TERRY! JESSICA'S DOG IS DEFINITELY DEAD! YOU SHOULD THROW IT AWAY!"
THROWING THE DOG AWAY WAS YOUR IDEA, NOT MINE.
IT WAS CERTAINLY DEAD. PERHAPS YOUR ROUGH HANDLING OF ITS CORPSE MANAGED TO RESTART ITS HEART?
THERE IS A LOT ABOUT DEATH AND NEAR-DEATH YOU CLEARLY DO NOT UNDERSTAND.
AND LET ME GUESS, YOU'RE AN EXPERT! YOU AND EVERYONE ELSE IS A FUCKING EXPERT ON EVERYTHING I'M DOING WRONG!

YOU THINK I DON'T KNOW THIS COULD BE A SHITTY IDEA? ALL OF MY OPTIONS WERE SHIT! BUT I GOT OUT OF A FIXED MURDER TRIAL!
I SAVED MYSELF FROM PRISON!
YOU ARE QUITE CAPABLE OF ESCAPING FROM PRISON ON YOUR OWN.
OH, YEAH! BECAUSE THAT'S A GOOD FUCKING IDEA!
COMING FROM THE GUY WHO THINKS IT'S OKAY TO HIJACK MY BODY AND JUST KILL PEOPLE!
YOU GAVE ME PERMISSION TO RUN HYPER MODE--
NO! YOU NEVER SAID YOU'D TAKE OVER MY BODY TO DO THAT!
YOU CANNOT USE MODES. I USE THEM FOR YOU.
HYPER MODE IS LESS ABSTRACT THAN NET OR RECOVERY MODE - WHOEVER ACTIVATES IT MUST BE IN CONTROL.
BUT I CANNOT DO THAT WITHOUT YOUR PERMISSION. I ASKED FOR YOUR PERMISSION, WHICH YOU GRANTED
I NEVER SAID YOU COULD KILL GABRIEL!

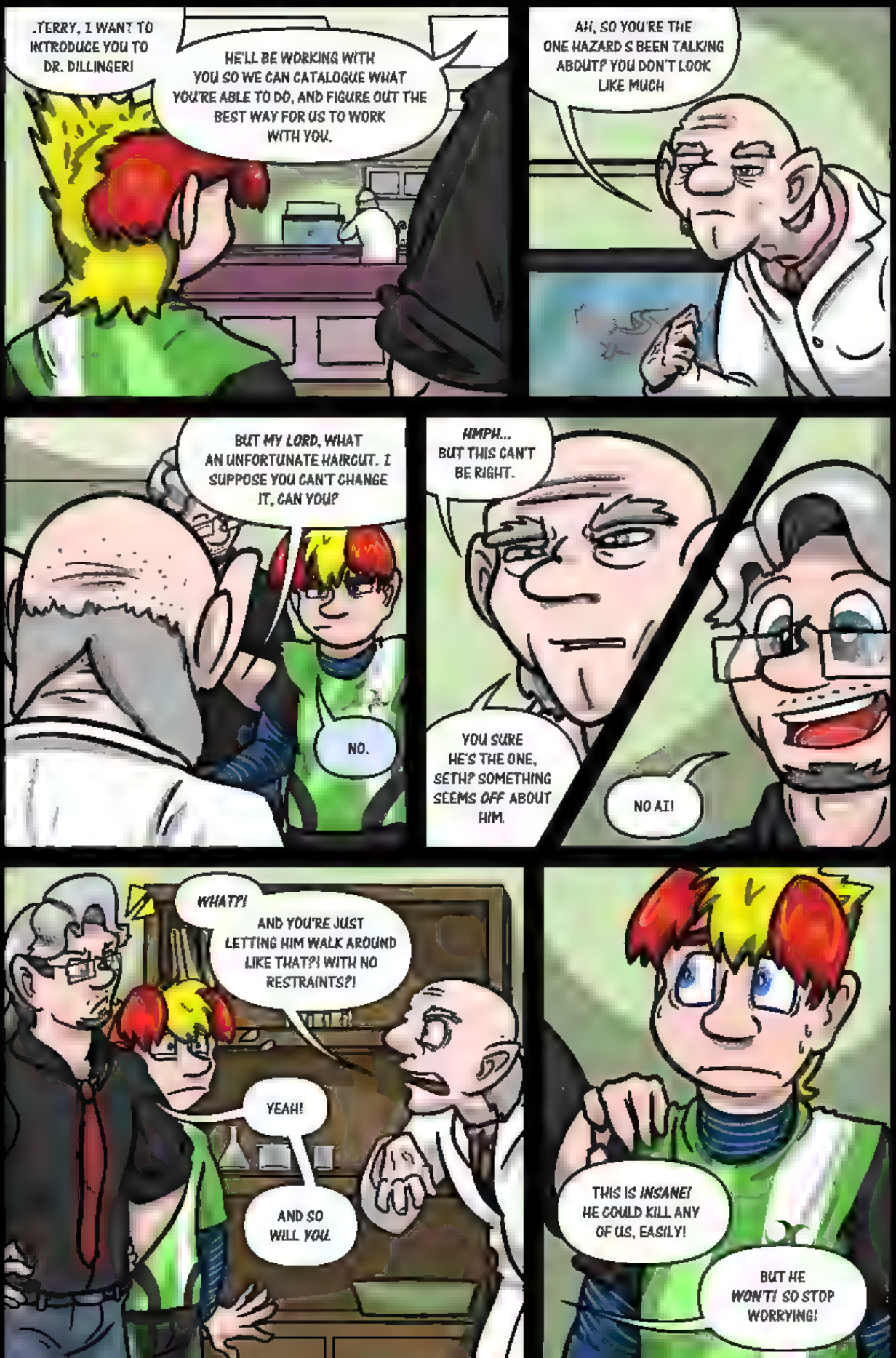
ARE YOU NOT SATISFIED WITH THE RESULTS OF THAT ENCOUNTER?
THE FUCK--
NO, I'M NOT SATISFIED!
I DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU EXPECTED TO HAPPEN.
I WANTED TO STOP THEM! ME! ME STOP THEM!
I THOUGHT HYPER MODE MADE ME STRONGER OR WHATEVER!
THEY WERE PREPARING TO KILL YOUR FRIENDS. AND YOU, IF THEY COULD MANAGE.
YOU COULD HAVE STOPPED THEM WITHOUT KILLING THEM! AND NOW EVERYONE THINKS I DID IT!
I JUST ..
I KNOW WHAT THEY WERE DOING,.. I KNOW HE WAS A SHITBAG, BUT
THEY'RE ACTUALLY DEAD, AREN'T THEY?
GOD, I FUCKED UP

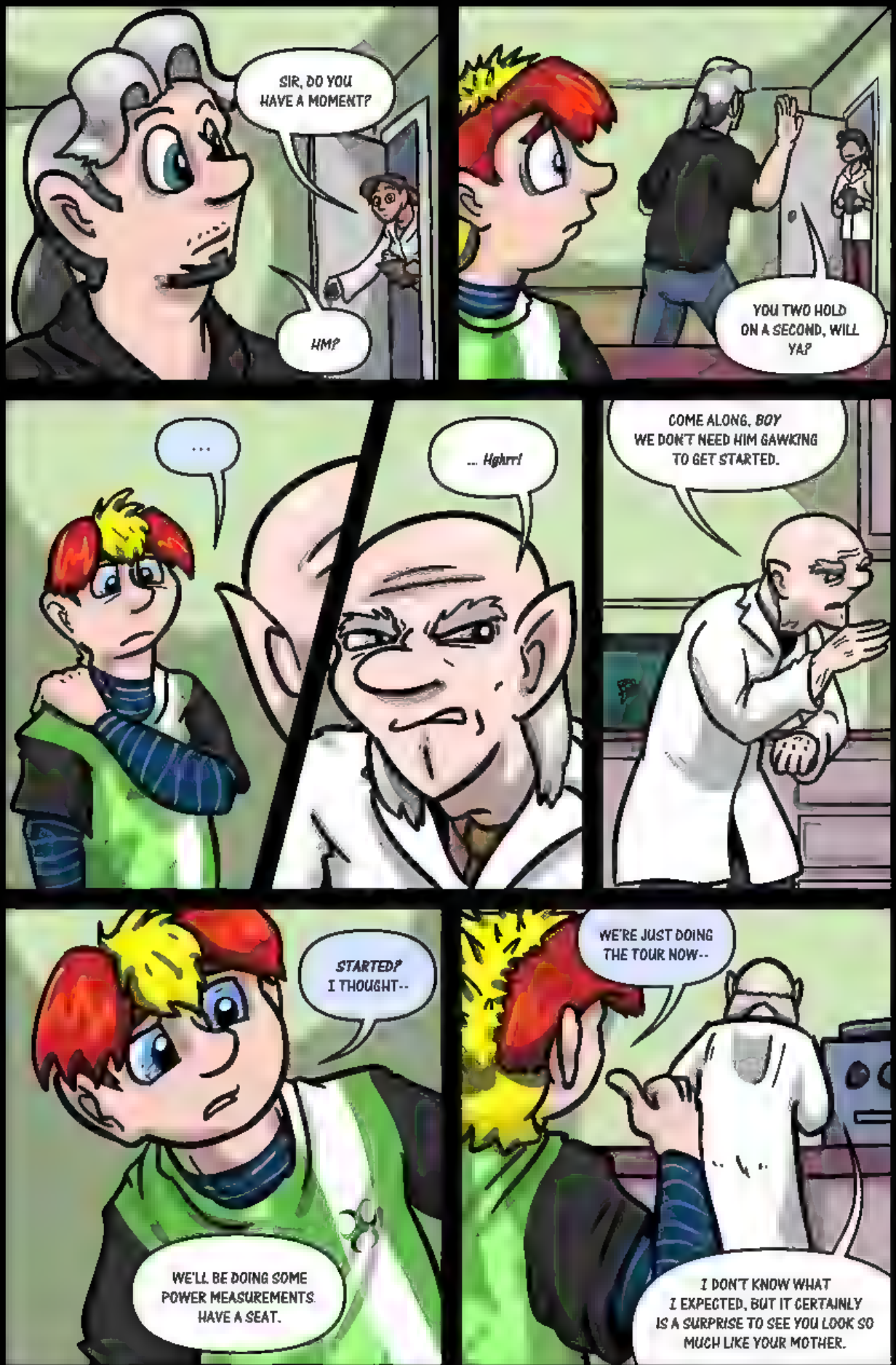
BREYKEN, AS I HAVE SAID BEFORE, I ONLY HAVE LIMITED ACCESS TO YOUR MIND, WHICH EXCLUDES YOUR FRONTAL LOBE. SO I CANNOT SEE WHAT YOU ARE THINKING, IN TERMS OF YOUR IDEAS AND OPINIONS...
BUT I AM ABLE TO SEE WHAT YOU'RE FEELING. AND WHILE I CANNOT PROCESS FEELINGS, I DO HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF WHICH ARE PREFERABLE TO HUMANS.
CAN YOU GET TO THE POINT?
YOU ARE SCARED I FORCED YOU TO DO SOMETHING YOU BELIEVE IS WRONG. IS THIS CORRECT?
... YES.
I APOLOGIZE FOR VIOLATING YOUR TRUST. I WILL DO BETTER TO RESPECT YOUR BOUNDARIES.
ADDITIONALLY, I WILL ACCEPT THIS YOUR CHOICE REGARDING HAZARD. WITH THIS CHOICE, HOWEVER, I MUST REQUEST THAT YOU DO NOT TELL HAZARD OR HIS STAFF THAT I ACCOMPANY YOU.
NOR SHOULD YOU INFORM THEM OF THE ALTERED HYPER MODE YOU HAVE.
IF HE THINKS YOU DO NOT HAVE AN AI, HE MAY JUST ASSUME YOU CANNOT BE CONTROLLED WITH HYPER MODE AND LEAVE IT AT THAT. BUT IF HE KNOWS THAT I AM HERE, THAT COULD BE DANGEROUS FOR US BOTH
FINE.

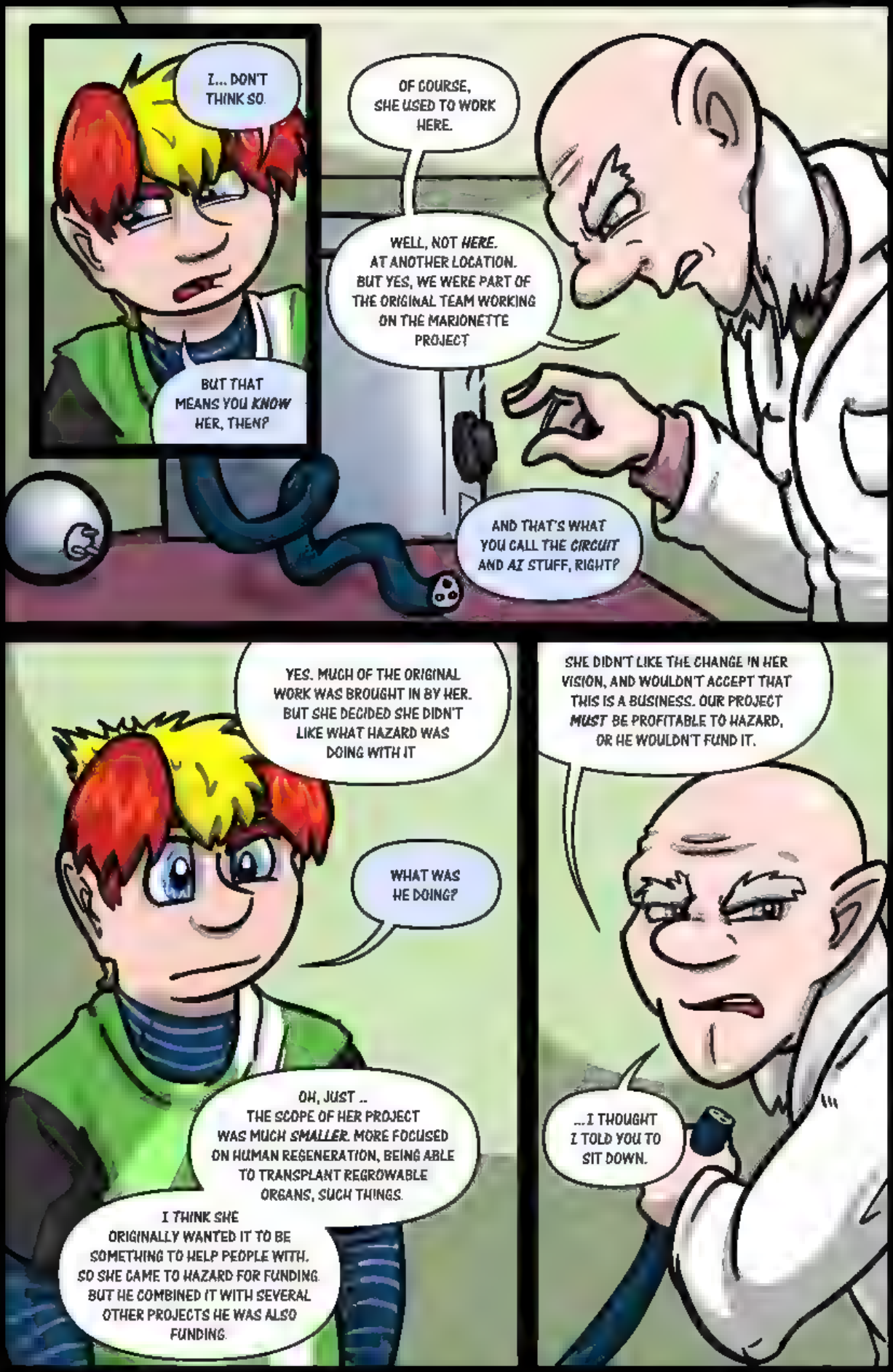
KNOCK KNOCK
PERFECT. AND YOU'VE EVEN DRESSED PROPERLY. ALL SET TO GO?
WHAT THE HELL IS THIS THING YOU TOLD ME TO WEAR?
THE MATERIAL WAS DEVELOPED BY HAZARD TECHNOLOGIES. I PERSONALLY DON'T HAVE THE DETAILS OF WHAT IT'S MADE OF
BUT IT'S SUPPOSED TO HELP YOU WITH YOUR ABILITIES. . SOMEHOW.
A BETTER QUESTION FOR THE OTHER STAFF, ONCE YOU'VE BEEN INTRODUCED
BUT FIRST, YOU'LL BE MEETING WITH HAZARD TO SHARE WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT THE MARIONETTE PROJECT AND DR. BREYKEN
HAZARD EXPECTS YOU TO TELL HIM EVERYTHING. IS THAT CLEAR?
SAY WHAT YOU WANT, BUT DO NOT TELL HIM ABOUT ME.
YES.

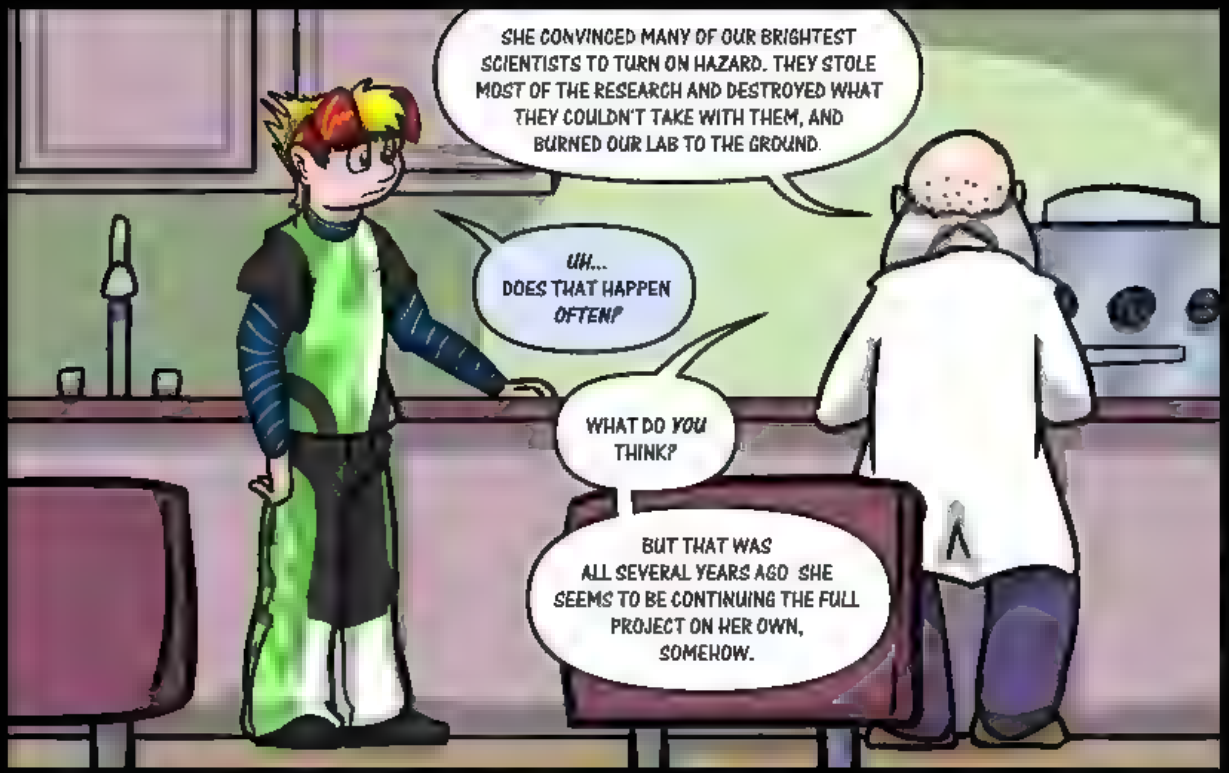
LATER...
... VIETNAM? HM. WE'VE CHECKED OVER THOSE JUNGLES BEFORE, BUT NEVER FOUND A TRACE OF HER LAB
AND THESE BLITZ HOUNDS SOUND LIKE A HANDFUL. I'M SURPRISED WE HAVEN'T SEEN THEM YET, BUT IT'S GOOD TO KNOW SHE'S VARYING HER ARSENAL.
SO SHE NEVER MENTIONED ANYTHING TO YOU ABOUT THE MP4-AI?
NO
THE ONLY TIME IT CAME UP WAS WHEN I FIRST WOKE UP, AND SHE SEEMED SURPRISED I DIDN'T HAVE IT
THAT IS ENOUGH.
SO IT SOUNDS LIKE SHE INTENDED TO GIVE IT TO YOU. VERY ODD! BUT LUCKY FOR YOU, I SUPPOSE!
BUT IF THAT'S EVERYTHING, THEN I THINK WE'RE READY FOR YOU TO START YOUR FIRST DAY HERE!
HOW'D YOU LIKE A TOUR OF THE BUILDING? GET TO MEET SOME OF THE STAFF?

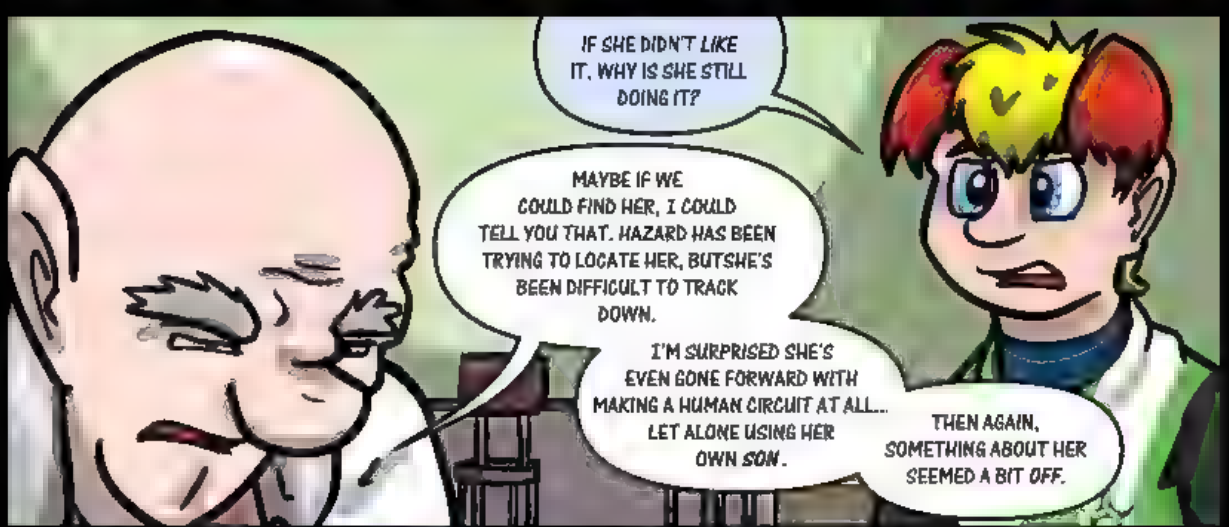
Eugh...
D-DO WE HAVE TO?
IS SOMETHING WRONG?
I-IT'S JUST . THEY, uh..
HE MENTIONED DR. BREYKEN'S BODYGUARD KNOCKED HIM OUT DURING A "TOUR" OF HER BUILDING.
OH!
HAHAHA HAHA!
WELL, THIS SURE IS AWKWARD! I PROMISE IT'S NOT THAT KIND OF TOUR!
BUT YOU STILL HAVE TO LEARN YOUR WAY AROUND THE BUILDING! SO LET'S GET GOING!


.TERRY, I WANT TO INTRODUCE YOU TO DR. DILLINGER!
HE'LL BE WORKING WITH YOU SO WE CAN CATALOGUE WHAT YOU'RE ABLE TO DO, AND FIGURE OUT THE BEST WAY FOR US TO WORK WITH YOU.
AH, SO YOU'RE THE ONE HAZARD S BEEN TALKING ABOUT? YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE MUCH
BUT MY LORD, WHAT AN UNFORTUNATE HAIRCUT. I SUPPOSE YOU CAN'T CHANGE IT, CAN YOU?
NO.
HMPH... BUT THIS CAN'T BE RIGHT.
YOU SURE HE'S THE ONE, SETH? SOMETHING SEEMS OFF ABOUT HIM.
NO AI!
WHAT?!
AND YOU'RE JUST LETTING HIM WALK AROUND LIKE THAT?! WITH NO RESTRAINTS?!
YEAH!
AND SO WILL YOU.
THIS IS INSANE! HE COULD KILL ANY OF US, EASILY!
BUT HE WON'T! SO STOP WORRYING!

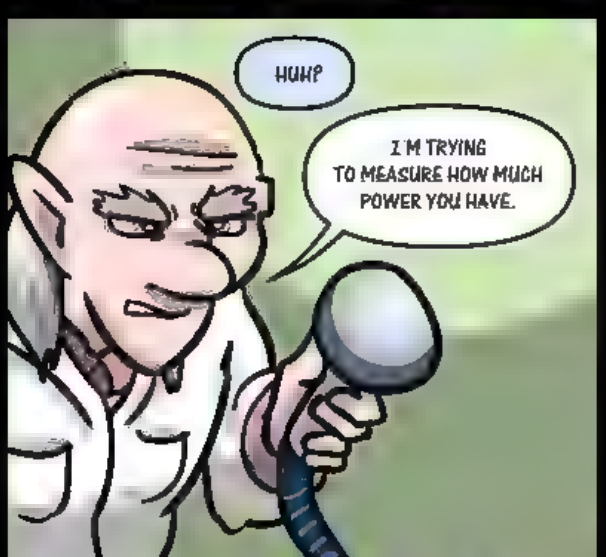

SIR, DO YOU HAVE A MOMENT?
HM?
YOU TWO HOLD ON A SECOND, WILL YA?
...
... Hgkrr!
COME ALONG, BOY WE DON'T NEED HIM GAWKING TO GET STARTED.
STARTED? I THOUGHT--
WE'LL BE DOING SOME POWER MEASUREMENTS. HAVE A SEAT.
WE'RE JUST DOING THE TOUR NOW--
I DON'T KNOW WHAT I EXPECTED, BUT IT CERTAINLY IS A SURPRISE TO SEE YOU LOOK SO MUCH LIKE YOUR MOTHER.


I... DON'T THINK SO.
OF COURSE, SHE USED TO WORK HERE.
WELL, NOT *HERE*. AT ANOTHER LOCATION. BUT YES, WE WERE PART OF THE ORIGINAL TEAM WORKING ON THE MARIONETTE PROJECT
BUT THAT MEANS YOU *KNOW* HER, THEN?
AND THAT'S WHAT YOU CALL THE *CIRCUIT* AND *AI* STUFF, RIGHT?
YES. MUCH OF THE ORIGINAL WORK WAS BROUGHT IN BY HER. BUT SHE DECIDED SHE DIDN'T LIKE WHAT HAZARD WAS DOING WITH IT
WHAT WAS HE DOING?
OH, JUST .. THE SCOPE OF HER PROJECT WAS MUCH *SMALLER*. MORE FOCUSED ON HUMAN REGENERATION, BEING ABLE TO TRANSPLANT REGROWABLE ORGANS, SUCH THINGS.
I THINK SHE ORIGINALLY WANTED IT TO BE SOMETHING TO HELP PEOPLE WITH. SO SHE CAME TO HAZARD FOR FUNDING. BUT HE COMBINED IT WITH SEVERAL OTHER PROJECTS HE WAS ALSO FUNDING.
SHE DIDN'T LIKE THE CHANGE IN HER VISION, AND WOULDN'T ACCEPT THAT THIS IS A BUSINESS. OUR PROJECT *MUST* BE PROFITABLE TO HAZARD, OR HE WOULDN'T FUND IT.
...I THOUGHT I TOLD YOU TO SIT DOWN.


SHE CONVINCED MANY OF OUR BRIGHTEST SCIENTISTS TO TURN ON HAZARD. THEY STOLE MOST OF THE RESEARCH AND DESTROYED WHAT THEY COULDN'T TAKE WITH THEM, AND BURNED OUR LAB TO THE GROUND.
UH... DOES THAT HAPPEN *OFTEN?*
WHAT DO *YOU* THINK?
BUT THAT WAS ALL SEVERAL YEARS AGO. SHE SEEMS TO BE CONTINUING THE FULL PROJECT ON HER OWN, SOMEHOW.


IF SHE DIDN'T *LIKE* IT, WHY IS SHE STILL DOING IT?
MAYBE IF WE COULD FIND HER, I COULD TELL YOU THAT. HAZARD HAS BEEN TRYING TO LOCATE HER, BUTSHE'S BEEN DIFFICULT TO TRACK DOWN.
I'M SURPRISED SHE'S EVEN GONE FORWARD WITH MAKING A HUMAN CIRCUIT AT ALL... LET ALONE USING HER OWN *SON*.
THEN AGAIN, SOMETHING ABOUT HER SEEMED A BIT *OFF*.

HERE. GRAB THIS END AND GIVE IT A GOOD ZAP.


HUH?
I'M TRYING TO MEASURE HOW MUCH POWER YOU HAVE.

BZZT!
ACK!
I SAID GRAB IT, YOU STUPID BOY!
I CAN'T, IT'S METAL.
WHAT?
I CAN'T USE MY POWERS WHEN I TOUCH METAL STUFF
WHAT ON EARTH DO YOU MEAN
. ARE YOU A PROTOTYPE?
UH--
HAZARD! WE HAVE A PROBLEM, HERE!

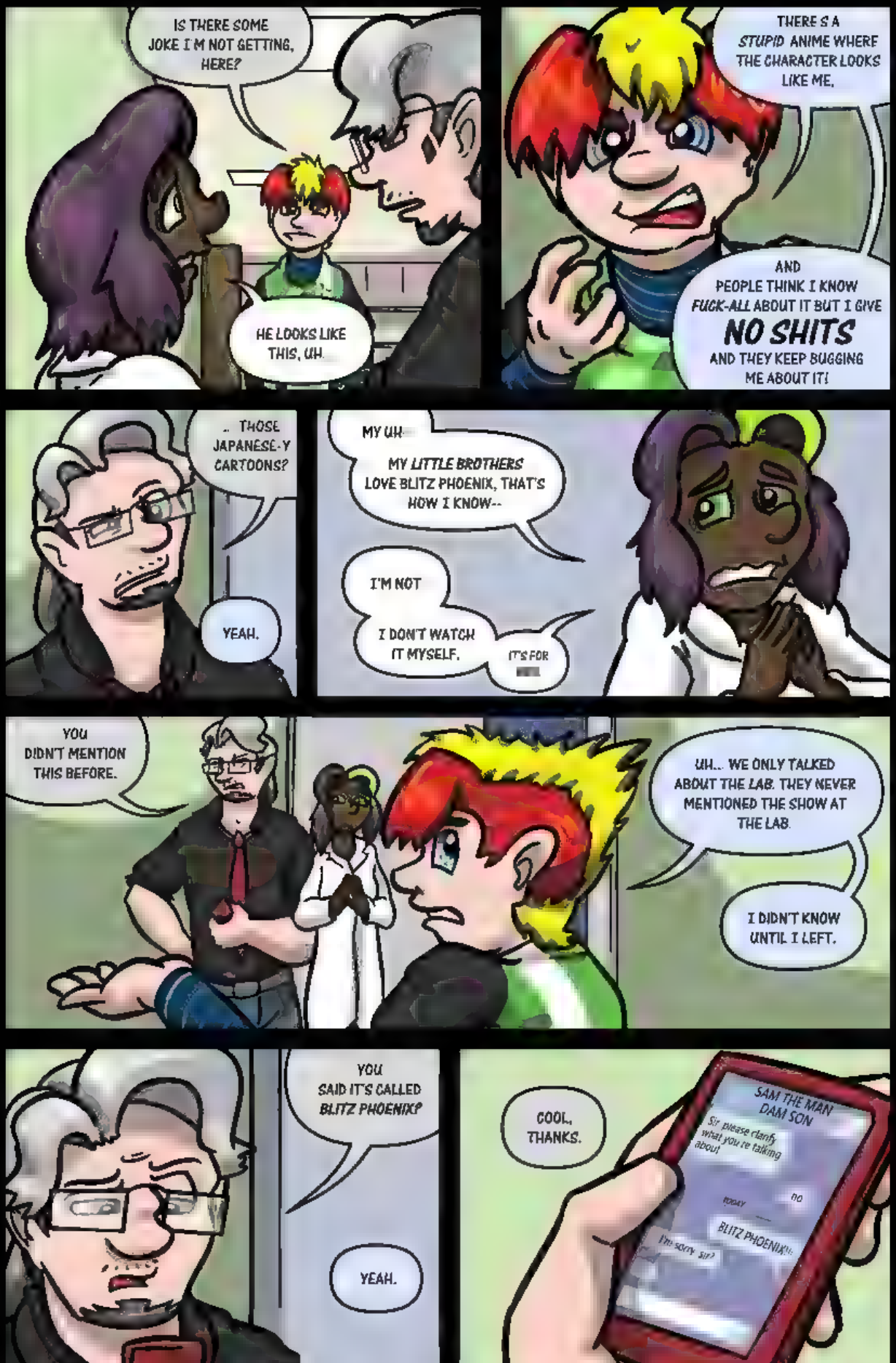
WHAT'S UP?
THIS BOY YOU'VE BROUGHT IN MUST BE A PROTOTYPE! HE HAS SAFETY LIMITERS IN PLACE!
SIGH
HIS POWERS LOCK UP UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS. HE CAN'T OPERATE WHEN HE'S TOUCHING METAL.
WHAT?
HE'S USELESS FOR ANY SERIOUS WORK!

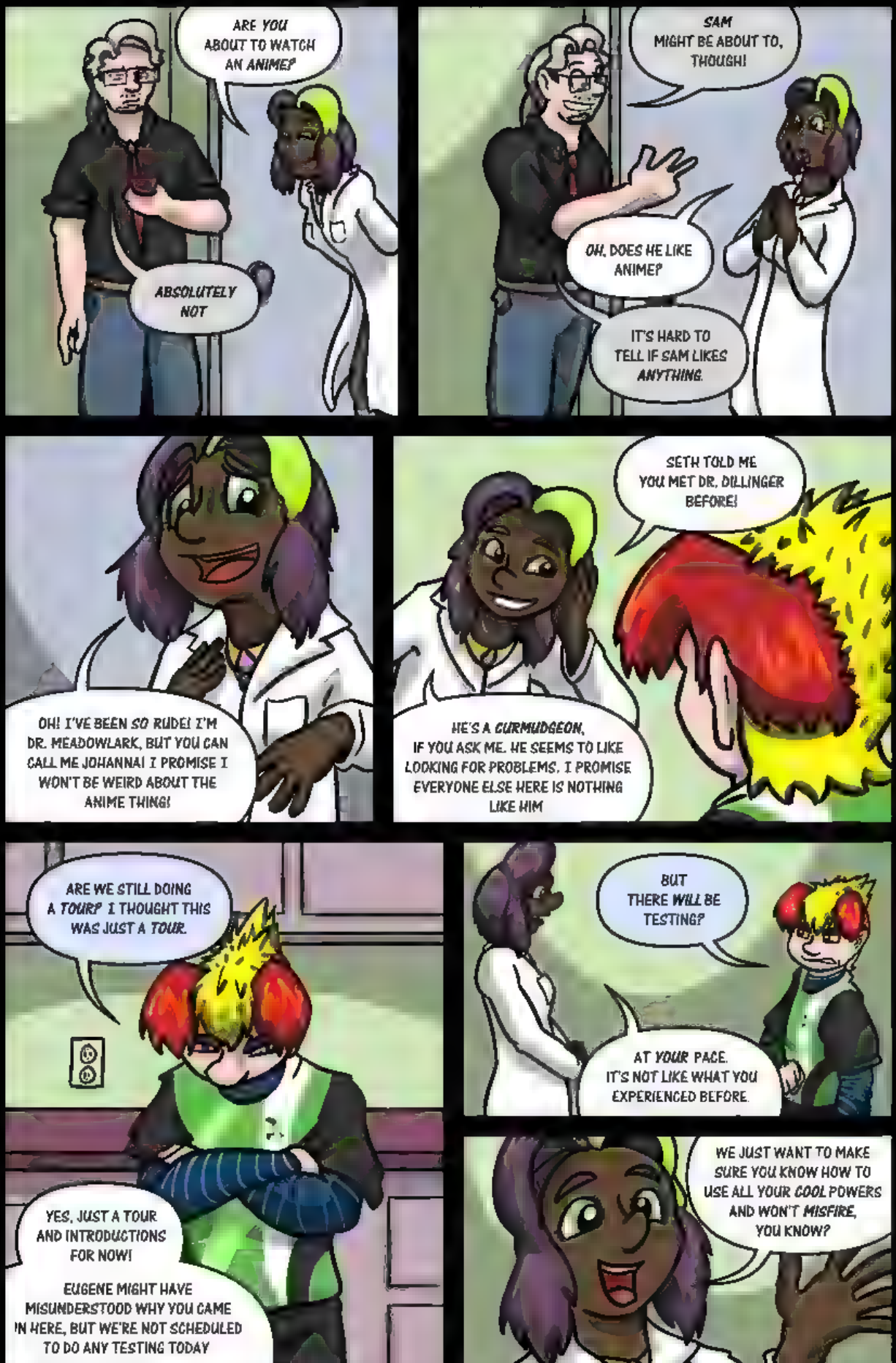
Well I mean
I wouldn't say useless
that's really hurtful
THAT'S NOT
A PROBLEM
HIS USEFULNESS ISN'T
FOR YOU TO DECIDE. YOU JUST
NEED TO FIGURE OUT WHAT HE
CAN AND CAN'T DO, AND PREP
HIM FOR WORK.
WHETHER DR. BREYKEN
CONSIDERS HIM A PROTOTYPE
OR NOT DOESN'T MATTER. HERE,
HE'S A STAFF MEMBER.
IF HE CAN'T TOUCH
METAL, THEN WE JUST MAKE
SURE HE WON'T
Harumph!
WELL, THIS TEST
WON'T WORK IF HE CAN'T HOLD
THIS END. WE'LL HAVE TO USE
THE OLD ATTACHMENTS THAT
WORK A BIT DIFFERENT

W-WHAT ARE YOU DOING
I STILL NEED YOUR MEASUREMENTS. JUST HOLD STILL WHILE--
YOU CAN SHOVE THAT END UP YOUR ASS!
YOU INSUFFERABLE BRAT! YOU CAN'T TALK TO ME LIKE THAT!
YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE TESTING HIM YET. THIS IS JUST THE TOUR-
GIVE ME YOUR--
GET THE FUCK AWAY FROM ME!
I'M NOT DOING ANYTHING YOU SAY, YOU WALKING ASSPACK!
STOP, EUGENE.
CIRCUITS DON'T GET TO TALK BACK HERE, BOY!
DON'T TOUCH ME!

STOP!
...Hrmph.
CREAK

TWENTY MINUTES LATER...
..He's really jumpy, so just try not to make him scared.
Okay.
SORRY TO KEEP YOU WAITING, SPORT!
DR. DILLINGER AND I DECIDED IT WOULD BE BETTER IF YOU WORKED WITH DR. MEADOWLARK INSTEAD.
TAKEO BLITZ?!
ARE THERE ANY OTHER DOCTORS AVAILABLE?
OH NO! FORGIVE ME! I KNOW YOU CAN'T CHANGE IT! SETH JUST DIDN'T TELL ME WHAT YOU LOOKED LIKE, I WASN'T EXPECTING THIS!


IS THERE SOME JOKE I'M NOT GETTING, HERE?
HE LOOKS LIKE THIS, UH.
THERE'S A STUPID ANIME WHERE THE CHARACTER LOOKS LIKE ME.
AND PEOPLE THINK I KNOW FUCK-ALL ABOUT IT BUT I GIVE NO SHITS AND THEY KEEP BUGGING ME ABOUT IT!
.. THOSE JAPANESE-Y CARTOONS?
YEAH.
MY UH
MY LITTLE BROTHERS LOVE BLITZ PHOENIX, THAT'S HOW I KNOW--
I'M NOT
I DON'T WATCH IT MYSELF.
IT'S FOR
YOU DIDN'T MENTION THIS BEFORE.
UH... WE ONLY TALKED ABOUT THE LAB. THEY NEVER MENTIONED THE SHOW AT THE LAB.
I DIDN'T KNOW UNTIL I LEFT.
YOU SAID IT'S CALLED BLITZ PHOENIX?
YEAH.
COOL, THANKS.
SAM THE MAN DAM SON
Sir please clarify what you're talking about
today
no
BLITZ PHOENIX!!!
I'm sorry sir?

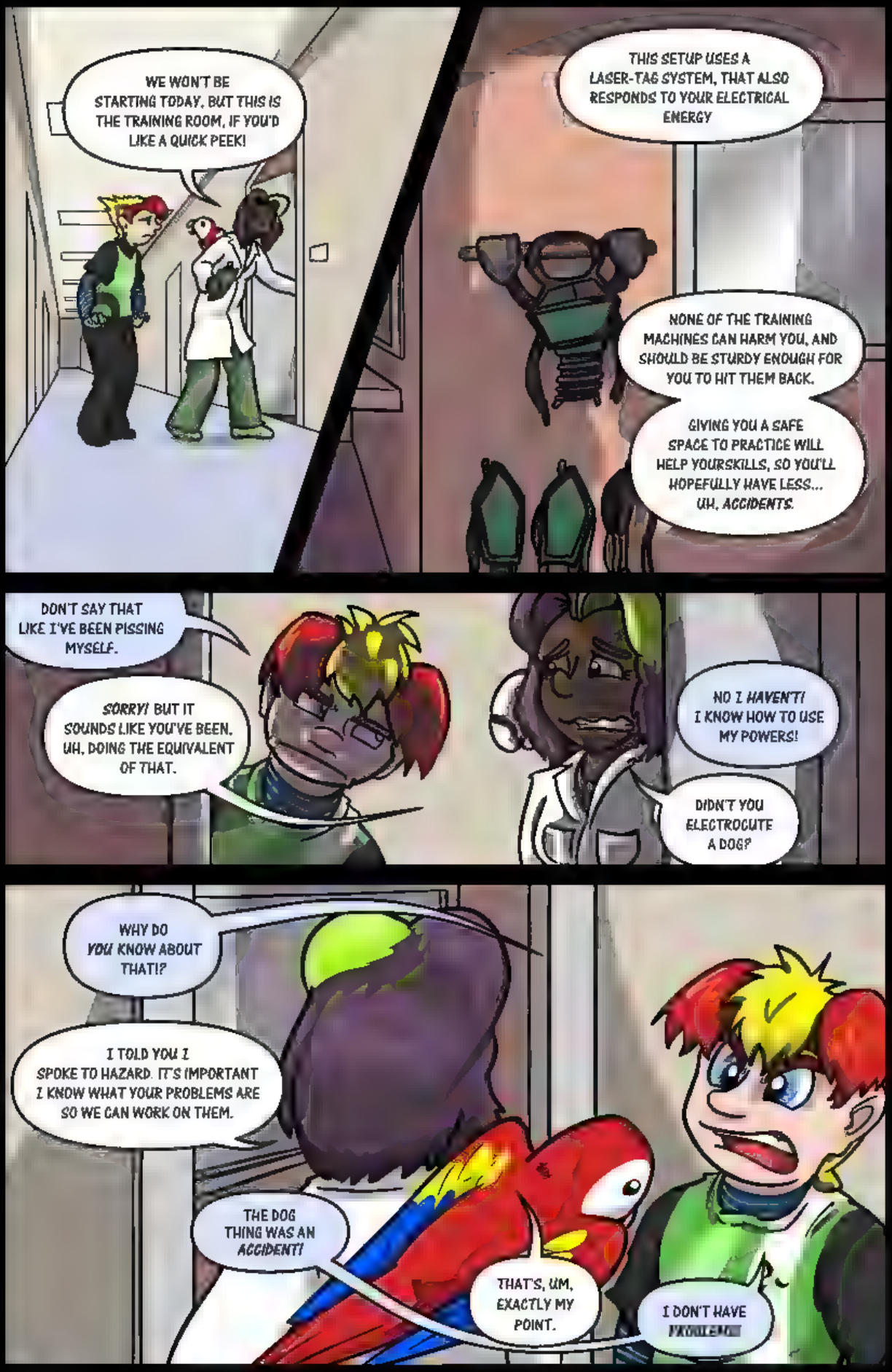

ARE YOU ABOUT TO WATCH AN ANIME?
ABSOLUTELY NOT
SAM MIGHT BE ABOUT TO, THOUGH!
OH, DOES HE LIKE ANIME?
IT'S HARD TO TELL IF SAM LIKES ANYTHING.
OH! I'VE BEEN SO RUDE! I'M DR. MEADOWLARK, BUT YOU CAN CALL ME JOHANNA! I PROMISE I WON'T BE WEIRD ABOUT THE ANIME THING!
SETH TOLD ME YOU MET DR. DILLINGER BEFORE!
HE'S A CURMUDGEON, IF YOU ASK ME. HE SEEMS TO LIKE LOOKING FOR PROBLEMS. I PROMISE EVERYONE ELSE HERE IS NOTHING LIKE HIM
ARE WE STILL DOING A TOUR? I THOUGHT THIS WAS JUST A TOUR.
YES, JUST A TOUR AND INTRODUCTIONS FOR NOW!
EUGENE MIGHT HAVE MISUNDERSTOOD WHY YOU CAME IN HERE, BUT WE'RE NOT SCHEDULED TO DO ANY TESTING TODAY
BUT THERE WILL BE TESTING?
AT YOUR PACE. IT'S NOT LIKE WHAT YOU EXPERIENCED BEFORE.
WE JUST WANT TO MAKE SURE YOU KNOW HOW TO USE ALL YOUR COOL POWERS AND WON'T MISFIRE, YOU KNOW?

SO WHY DON'T YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF?
SETH SAID YOU'RE FROM FLATBROOK, RIGHT?
MY SISTER LIVES OVER THERE, IT'S SUCH A NICE LITTLE TOWN!
...YEAH. BUT MY DAD AND I MOVED AROUND A LOT BEFORE HE..
OH, I'M SORRY. SWEETHEART I DIDN'T MEAN TO BRING THAT UP..
HOW ABOUT THIS, DO YOU HAVE ANY PETS?
... A CAT. THAT WAS A LONG TIME AGO, THOUGH.
I LOVE CATS! MY CAT CASPER IS ALWAYS GETTING INTO TROUBLE.

OH! SETH, HAS HE MET PEEKO YET?
NO, HE HASN'T!
GREAT IDEA, I'LL GO GRAB HER.
LISTEN, I'M SAYING ALL THE WRONG THINGS. BUT I REALLY DON'T MEAN TO MAKE YOU UNCOMFORTABLE.
HAZARD TOLD ME WHAT YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH. AND I WANT TO MAKE SURE NO ONE HERE TREATS YOU LIKE THAT.
MOST PEOPLE HERE ARE *SUPER* NICE AND UNDERSTANDING! I'M SORRY YOU MET EUGENE FIRST, MOST EVERYONE HERE HAS TROUBLE GETTING ALONG WITH HIM
I KNOW YOU'VE BEEN THROUGH A LOT, AND IT'S A BIG CHANGE TO PACK UP YOUR LIFE AND COME MOVE HERE TO WORK.
SO, I'M SORRY FOR SOUNDING LIKE SUCH A JERK RIGHT OFF THE BAT, AND I HOPE YOU CAN GIVE ME A CHANCE

TERRY! HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT BIRDS?!
RAAWAAK!
Eauughh--
PEEKO'S A PARROT?
WHAT, YOU'RE NOT AFRAID OF BIRDS TOO, ARE YOU?
UH, NO--
I'VE JUST NEVER--
HERE, HOLD YOUR ARM OUT.
HAHA-HA HA HA
'EEKO! 'EEKO! RAY 'ELLO!
WHY--
STOP--
HAHA! SHE'S EXCITED TO FIND SOMEONE JUST AS STYLISH AS HER, I THINK.
OKAY. WE SHOULD BE DONE WITH THIS ROOM HOW ABOUT WE CONTINUE WITH THE TOUR?
I NEED TO MAKE SOME CALLS. SO JOHANNA WILL GUIDE YOU AROUND NOW. ALRIGHT?
FINE, I GUESS.

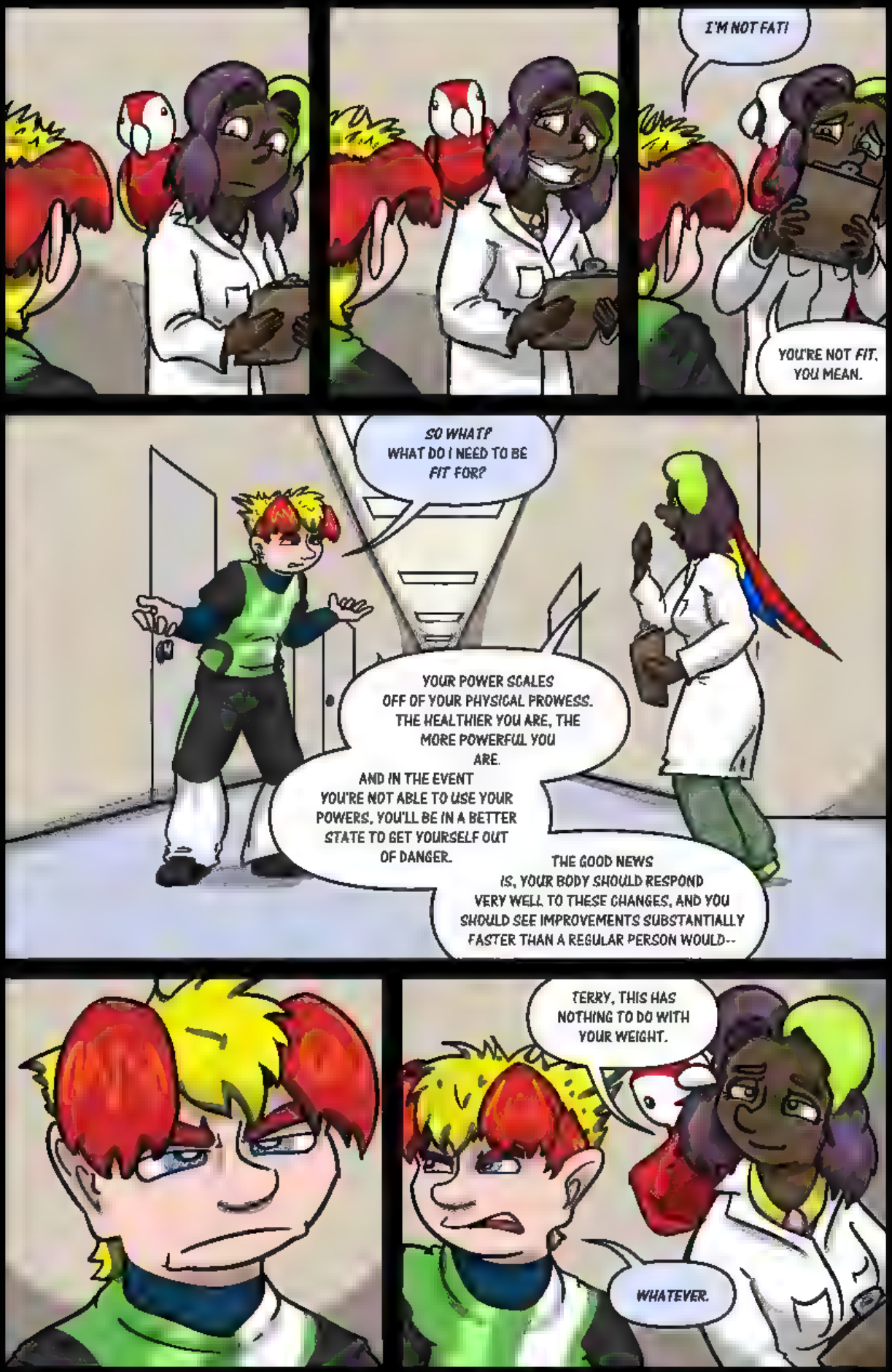
.. IF SHE'S BOTHERING YOU, I CAN TAKE HER.
YEAH.
SO HAZARD TELLS ME YOU DIDN'T FINISH YOUR TRAINING AT AMANDA'S LAB?
I MEAN... I GUESS NOT?
I KNOW THIS ISN'T GOING TO SOUND GOOD, BUT WE NEED TO MAKE SURE YOU KNOW HOW TO USE YOUR POWERS. SO WE'LL BE DOING SOME TRAINING HERE.
NOTHING WITH LIVE ANIMALS! OR EVEN OTHER CIRCUITS!
AND YOU CAN CALL IT QUITS IF YOU'RE FEELING OVERWHELMED! I PROMISE!


WE WON'T BE STARTING TODAY, BUT THIS IS THE TRAINING ROOM, IF YOU'D LIKE A QUICK PEEK!
THIS SETUP USES A LASER-TAG SYSTEM, THAT ALSO RESPONDS TO YOUR ELECTRICAL ENERGY
NONE OF THE TRAINING MACHINES CAN HARM YOU, AND SHOULD BE STURDY ENOUGH FOR YOU TO HIT THEM BACK.
GIVING YOU A SAFE SPACE TO PRACTICE WILL HELP YOURSKILLS, SO YOU'LL HOPEFULLY HAVE LESS... UH, ACCIDENTS.
DON'T SAY THAT LIKE I'VE BEEN PISSING MYSELF.
SORRY! BUT IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU'VE BEEN, UH, DOING THE EQUIVALENT OF THAT.
NO I HAVEN'T! I KNOW HOW TO USE MY POWERS!
DIDN'T YOU ELECTROCUTE A DOG?
WHY DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT!?
I TOLD YOU I SPOKE TO HAZARD. IT'S IMPORTANT I KNOW WHAT YOUR PROBLEMS ARE SO WE CAN WORK ON THEM.
THE DOG THING WAS AN ACCIDENT!
THAT'S, UM, EXACTLY MY POINT.
I DON'T HAVE [redacted]

EVERYONE HAS PROBLEMS, TERRY. I'M NOT JUDGING YOU. I'M HERE TO HELP YOU GET BETTER.
YOU'RE JUST TRYING TO MAKE ME INTO WHATEVER IT IS HAZARD *WANTS* ME TO BE!
I MEAN... I SUPPOSE? THINK OF IT AS *JOB TRAINING*. SETH WANTS YOU TO BE PREPARED TO DO YOUR JOB, BEFORE YOU'RE ACTUALLY DOING IT.
YOU'RE A *TEAM MEMBER* HERE, TERRY NOT A PRISONER OR AN EXPERIMENT. WE'RE NOT HERE TO HURT YOU.
LET'S CONTINUE WITH THE TOUR, OKAY?

SO TO START, YOU'LL BE MOSTLY PRACTICING YOUR POWERS IN THE TRAINING ROOM, BUT YOU'LL ALSO BE EXPECTED TO MAINTAIN A FITNESS ROUTINE AND AN APPROVED DIET.

DIET? ARE YOU SAYING I'M *FAT?*


I'M NOT FAT!
YOU'RE NOT FIT, YOU MEAN.
SO WHAT? WHAT DO I NEED TO BE FIT FOR?
YOUR POWER SCALES OFF OF YOUR PHYSICAL PROWESS. THE HEALTHIER YOU ARE, THE MORE POWERFUL YOU ARE.
AND IN THE EVENT YOU'RE NOT ABLE TO USE YOUR POWERS, YOU'LL BE IN A BETTER STATE TO GET YOURSELF OUT OF DANGER.
THE GOOD NEWS IS, YOUR BODY SHOULD RESPOND VERY WELL TO THESE CHANGES, AND YOU SHOULD SEE IMPROVEMENTS SUBSTANTIALLY FASTER THAN A REGULAR PERSON WOULD--
TERRY, THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH YOUR WEIGHT.
WHATEVER.

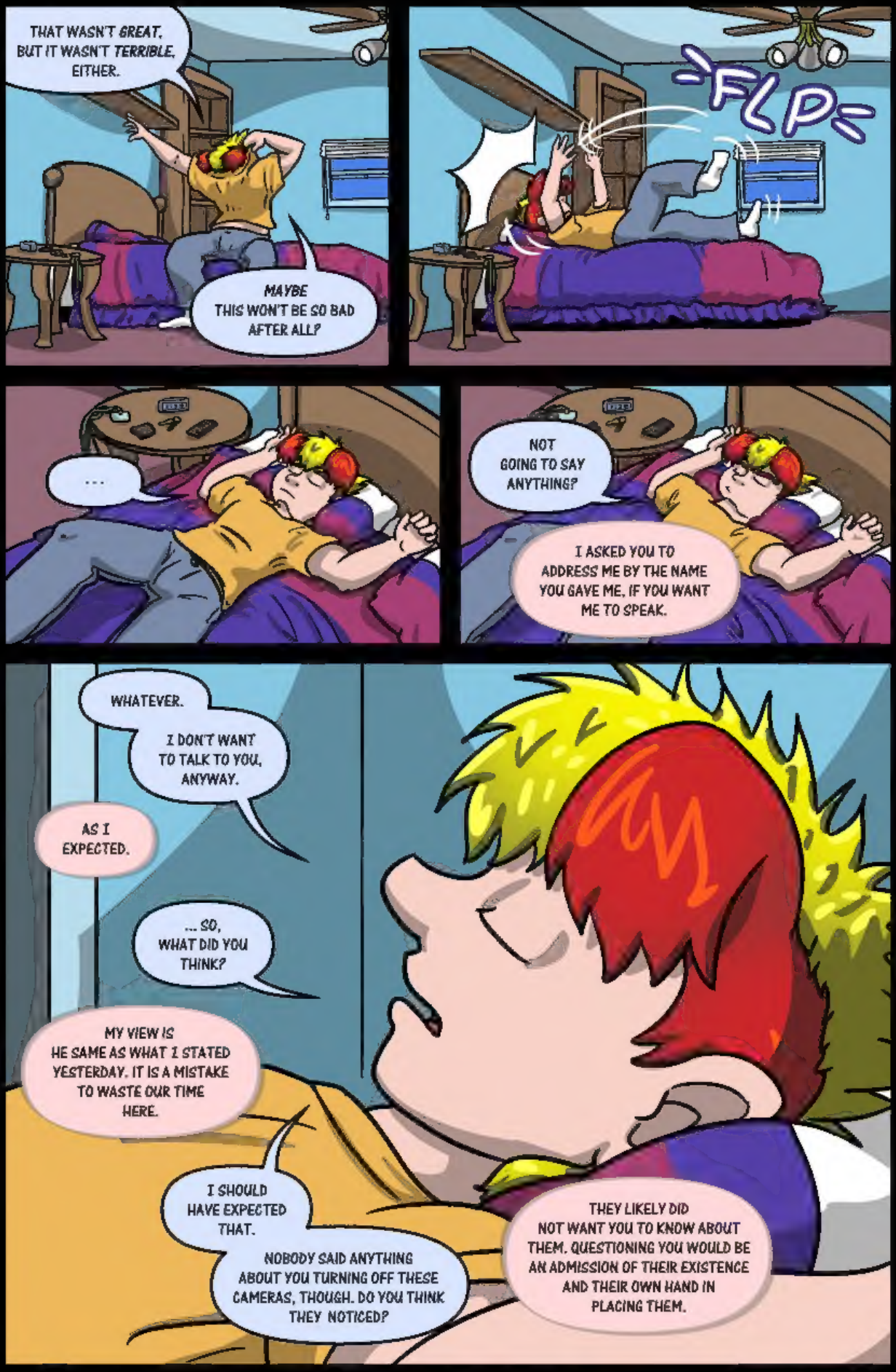
THE CAFETERIA IS DOWN THIS WAY. THE CHEFS ALREADY HAVE YOUR DIET PLAN, SO THEY'LL HANDLE IT FOR YOU DURING THE DAY. IT'LL JUST BE UP TO YOU TO FOLLOW IT AT HOME FOR DINNER AND WEEKENDS.
WHAT'S THIS WAY?
AAH, UH, THAT'S OFF-LIMITS.
SQUIK SQUIK
SQUIK SQUIK
I THOUGHT I HAD ACCESS TO THE WHOLE BUILDING?
THE WHOLE BUILDING EXCEPT THAT HALLWAY. THAT MIGHT CHANGE LATER, BUT DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT RIGHT NOW.
SO ANYWAY, YOUR DAILY ROUTINE WILL BE TO CHECK IN WITH ME, THEN MOVE TO THE GYM, THEN TRAINING WITH THE ROBOTS.
ONCE HAZARD AND I THINK YOU'RE READY, YOU'LL BE MOVING ONTO FIELD WORK WITH HIM.
AND WHAT'S THE FIELD WORK?
YOU'LL HAVE TO ASK HIM THAT. I DON'T KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT IT.

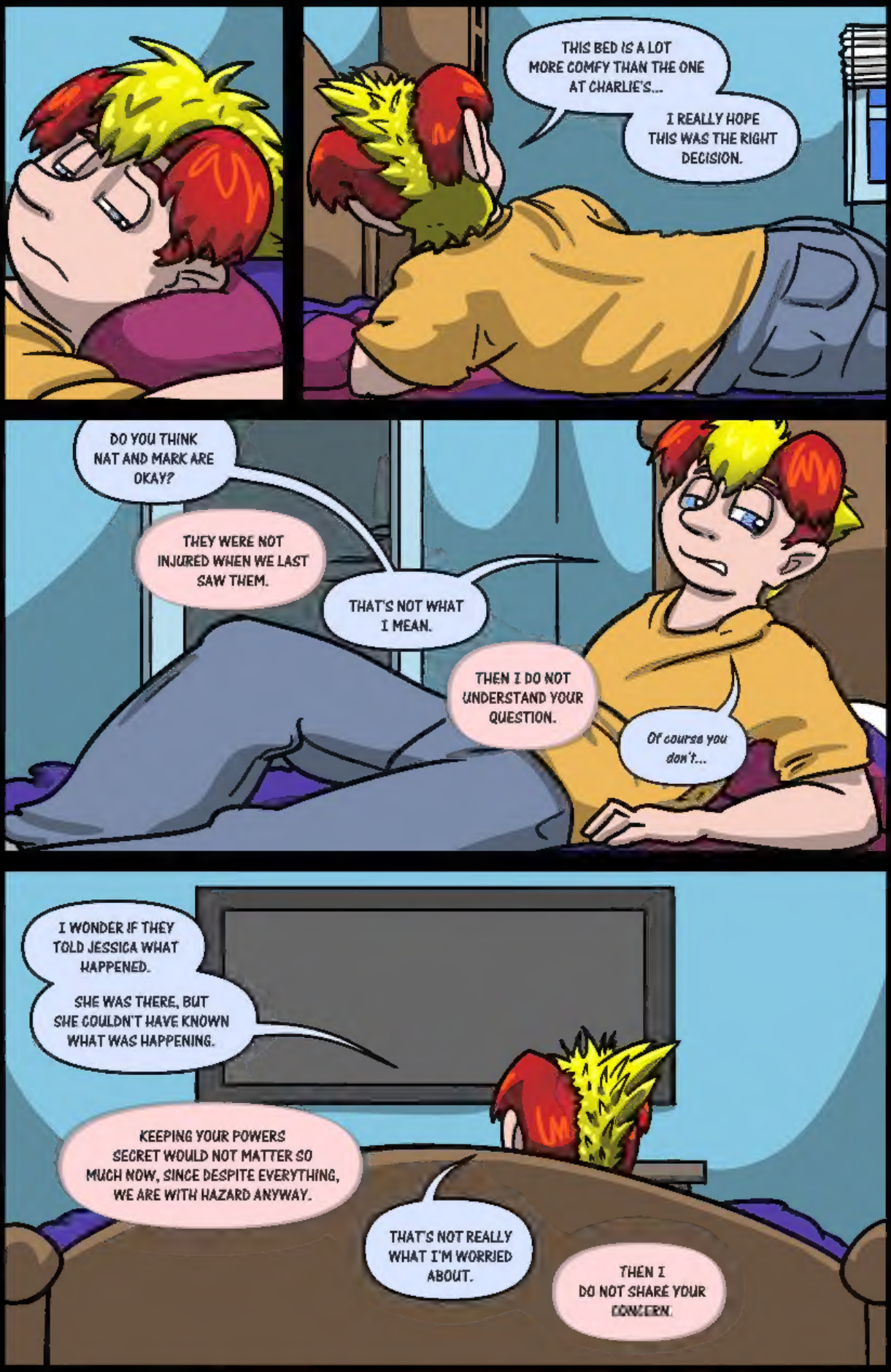
OH, IT LOOKS LIKE IT'S NOON NOW, SO WE CAN BREAK FOR LUNCH UNLESS YOU HAVE ANY MORE QUESTIONS?
YEAH, WHAT'S THIS STUPID SUIT I'M WEARING? SAM SAID IT WAS A COMPANY UNIFORM, BUT I DON'T SEE ANYONE ELSE WEARING IT...
OH! RIGHT! I GUESS YOU COULD SAY IT'S A UNIFORM...
THE FULL-BODY SUIT YOU'RE WEARING IS A MATERAL WE DESIGNED HERE. IT ABSORBS ELECTRICITY AND USES IT TO CREATE A LIGHT PROTECTIVE FORCE FIELD AROUND YOUR BODY
YOU CAN CHARGE IT YOURSELF, BUT IT'LL ALSO HELP INTERCEPT ELECTRICAL DAMAGE FROM OTHER SOURCES
THERE S SOME OTHER GEAR PIECES YOU'LL BE GETTING LATER, WHEN WE START YOUR TRAINING!
Bzzt
RAAK!!
OH! COOL!

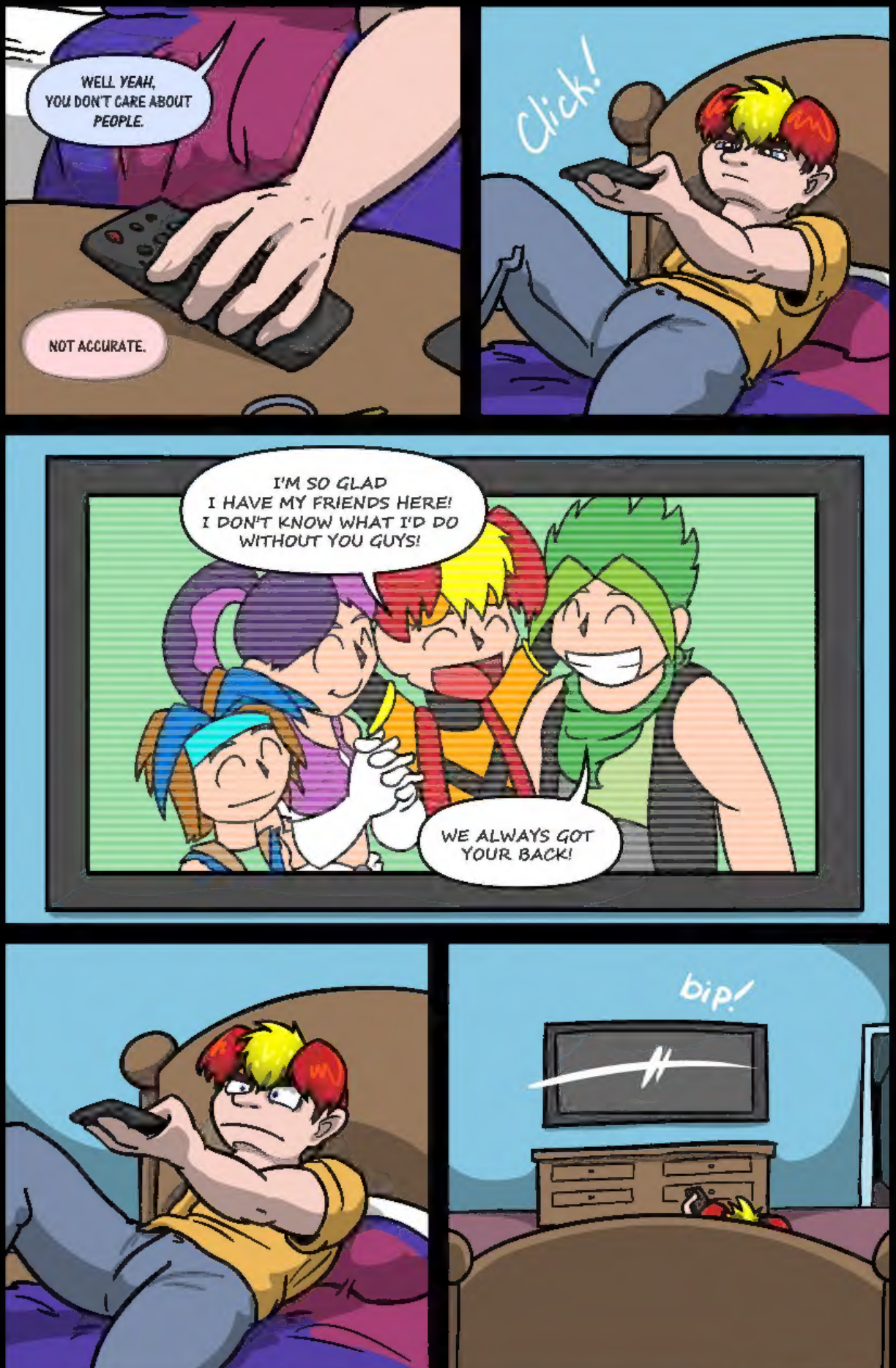
RAWK
RAWK
RAWK
OH, WHOOPS.
SHE'S FINE, NO WORRIES
AS FOR THE REST OF IT...
THERE'S DIFFERENT DRESS CODES FOR ALL THE STAFF. THE SCIENTISTS HERE ALL ARE REQUIRE TO WEAR LAB COATS, FOR EXAMPLE.
HAZARD DECIDED IT SHOULD BE CLEAR TO EVERYONE IN THE BUILDINGTHAT YOU'RE A CIRCUIT..
...SO THE SHIRT AND PANTS DESIGNS ARE UNIQUE TO YOU.
YEAH, BECAUSE IT'S NOT CLEAR I'M A CIRCUIT, HERE.
HAHA! WELL, WE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT YOU WERE GOING TO LOOK LIKE, BEFORE HAZARD WENT TO MEET YOU! DO ANY OTHER QUESTIONS?
..
WHAT ARE YOUR PROBLEMS?
HUH?
YOU SAID EVERYONE HAS PROBLEMS. AND IT'S KINDA WEIRD YOU KNOW SO MUCH ABOUT ME, SO WHAT ARE YOURS?

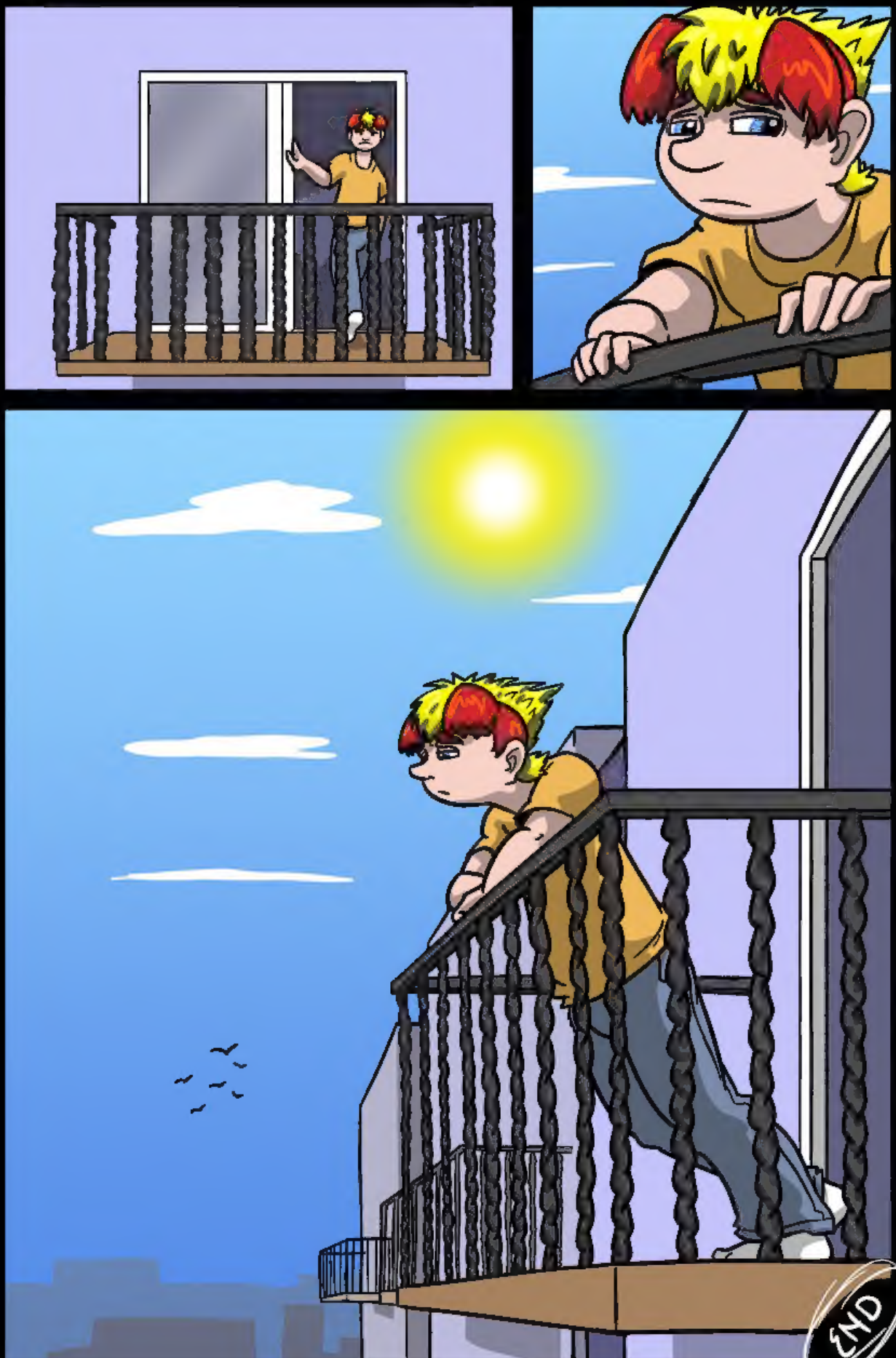
UM...
I SUPPOSE THAT'S FAIR.
...
UM... I DON'T...
YEAH, IT'S NOT SO FUN WHEN IT'S ABOUT YOU, IS IT?
I'M SORRY IF I'VE MADE YOU UNCOMFORTABLE.
NO YOU'RE NOT
I KNOW IT MAY TAKE SOME TIME FOR YOU TO TRUST US, BUT I HOPE--
YOU KNOW AMANDA'S LAB HAD NICE GUYS TOO, RIGHT?
JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE SMILEY AND HAVEN'T SHOVED ME IN A CELL FIRST THING DOESN'T MEAN I LIKE YOU.
THAT'S FAIR! YOU'RE RIGHT, I SHOULDN'T BE PUSHING ANYTHING ON YOU.

CAN YOU STOP DOING THAT?
DOING WHAT?
BEING SO... AGREEABLE.
OH, I'M SORRY! IS THAT A PROBLEM?
BZZT BZZT BZZT
-SIGH-
NEVERMIND.
WELL! IF THAT'S ALL YOUR QUESTIONS, THEN THAT SHOULD BE IT FOR YOUR ORIENTATION!
YOU CAN GO AHEAD TO LUNCH, AND YOU'LL BE DONE FOR THE DAY AFTER THAT. TOMORROW WILL BE YOUR FIRST FULL DAY!
SERIOUSLY?
... UH, COOL. THANKS.


THAT WASN'T GREAT, BUT IT WASN'T TERRIBLE, EITHER.
MAYBE THIS WON'T BE SO BAD AFTER ALL?
FLP
...
NOT GOING TO SAY ANYTHING?
I ASKED YOU TO ADDRESS ME BY THE NAME YOU GAVE ME, IF YOU WANT ME TO SPEAK.
WHATEVER.
I DON'T WANT TO TALK TO YOU, ANYWAY.
AS I EXPECTED.
... SO, WHAT DID YOU THINK?
MY VIEW IS THE SAME AS WHAT I STATED YESTERDAY. IT IS A MISTAKE TO WASTE OUR TIME HERE.
I SHOULD HAVE EXPECTED THAT.
NOBODY SAID ANYTHING ABOUT YOU TURNING OFF THESE CAMERAS, THOUGH. DO YOU THINK THEY NOTICED?
THEY LIKELY DID NOT WANT YOU TO KNOW ABOUT THEM. QUESTIONING YOU WOULD BE AN ADMISSION OF THEIR EXISTENCE AND THEIR OWN HAND IN PLACING THEM.


THIS BED IS A LOT MORE COMFY THAN THE ONE AT CHARLIE'S...
I REALLY HOPE THIS WAS THE RIGHT DECISION.
DO YOU THINK NAT AND MARK ARE OKAY?
THEY WERE NOT INJURED WHEN WE LAST SAW THEM.
THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEAN.
THEN I DO NOT UNDERSTAND YOUR QUESTION.
Of course you don't...
I WONDER IF THEY TOLD JESSICA WHAT HAPPENED.
SHE WAS THERE, BUT SHE COULDN'T HAVE KNOWN WHAT WAS HAPPENING.
KEEPING YOUR POWERS SECRET WOULD NOT MATTER SO MUCH NOW, SINCE DESPITE EVERYTHING, WE ARE WITH HAZARD ANYWAY.
THAT'S NOT REALLY WHAT I'M WORRIED ABOUT.
THEN I DO NOT SHARE YOUR CONCERN.


WELL YEAH, YOU DON'T CARE ABOUT PEOPLE.
NOT ACCURATE.
Click!
I'M SO GLAD I HAVE MY FRIENDS HERE! I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'D DO WITHOUT YOU GUYS!
WE ALWAYS GOT YOUR BACK!
bip!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